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ABSTRACT

This research sought to separate aspects of parental control from parental warmth and to investigate the impact of parents' control to child outcomes related to literacy and work-related social skills at the start of kindergarten. Family rules, limits, and disciplinary practices were explored as predictors of cognitive and social school preparedness. Participating were 198 kindergarten children and their families from Greensboro, North Carolina. The sample was evenly divided by gender and the racial composition was 78 percent White and 21 percent African-American. Data were collected by means of a parent self-report questionnaire, a parenting questionnaire assessing the amount of parental control, the teacher-completed Cooper-Farran Behavior Rating Scale to measure behaviors involved in the successful completion of academic tasks, and academic skills (letter recognition, receptive vocabulary on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised, and reading recognition on the PIAT-R). Results of regression analyses indicated that social skills predicted 19 percent of the variance in letter recognition, 14 percent in vocabulary, and 8 percent in reading recognition. There was a significant positive relationship between parental control and work-related skills. There was a marginally significant tendency for parental rules/limits/discipline to predict letter recognition, receptive vocabulary, and reading recognition. With the effects of work-related social skills removed, the tendency for literacy outcomes to be related to parental control was no longer apparent. Thus, children's social skills acted as a mediator between parental control and literacy outcomes at the beginning of kindergarten. (Contains 11 references.) (Author/KB)

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Relations Among Aspects of Parental Control, Children's Work-related Social Skills and Academic Achievement

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Accumulating evidence has identified individual differences in children's literacy and work-related social skills when children start kindergarten. The project sought to separate parental control from warmth (which have both been included in multi-dimensionsal investigations of Baumrind's parenting styles) and investigate the impact of parents' control on several outcome measures. Rules, limits and disciplinary practices in the home were explored as a predictor of school preparedness, both cognitively and socially. Aspects of control in the home directly influenced children's work-related social skills at the start of kindergarten. In addition, these social skills mediated the relationship between parental control and academic achievement (letter recognition, reading recognition, and receptive vocabulary) in kindergarten.

Relationship Between Aspects of Parental Control, Children's Work-related Social Skills and Academic Achievement

Evidence documenting large individual differences in academic skill levels and learning-related social skills at school entry provides evidence that non-schooling factors, like the family, are at least partially responsible for comprehensive school readiness (Robeson, Morrison, & Griffin, 1996; Alexander & Entwisle, 1988). Aspects of the family literacy environment (shared book reading and rich, elaborative talking) are found to enhance children's literacy and language skills (Griffin & Morrison, 1997; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). However, findings also indicate that school readiness may involve more than merely acquiring literacy skills. Recent research investigations point to the importance of learning-related social skills in school success (Griffin, 1997; Wentzel, 1993). This focus on the importance of social skills raises the possibility that other aspects of parenting may also influence academic achievement, either directly or indirectly, through their effect on social development.

Parental Control

There are many additional conceptualizations of parenting practices. Baumrind (1971) hypothesized three general parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. These styles were revised by Maccoby and Martin (1983) whose two-dimensional classification categorized parenting patterns according to the degree of parental warmth and control in the home. Children raised by parents who were both responsive and exert high levels of control (i.e. democratic or authoritative) performed better across an array of cognitive and social developmental outcomes from preschool (Baumrind, 1971) to high school (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbush, 1991; Steinberg, 1996). Their contrasting peers with non-responsive parents who exhibited little control (i.e. neglected) were at risk for academic failure, problem

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behaviors, low self-esteem, and poor mental health. These two-dimensional parenting styles predicted a wide range of intellectual skills and areas of self-competence.

However, less information is available about the isolated effects of parental control on children's school preparedness. The present investigation examined the unique relation between parental control and children's skills at school entry. Parental rules, limits, and disciplinary practices no doubt affect elementary school children's behavior. In addition, the goal of such parenting practices at this young age is likely not directly focused on academic outcomes, but socialization. Therefore, level of parental control was expected to predict children's social skills. Given previous research findings that social skills directly influenced literacy outcomes at school entry, this investigation also tested the model depicted in Figure 1 (according to the analysis plan described by Baron and Kenny, 1986) that children's social skills would act as a mediator between parental rules/limits/discipline and literacy outcomes.

Aims of the Study

In general, the present project investigated the relationship between parental control, children's work-related social skills, and children's literacy skills at school entry. The project addressed the following questions:

1. Does parental control directly predict children's work-related social skills and their literacy skills at the start of kindergarten?

2. Does parental control predict a child's academic achievement after taking into account a child's learning-related social ability? In other words, the project examined whether work-related social skills mediate the relationship between parental control and literacy outcome measures.

Method and Procedure

Subjects

One hundred ninety-eight kindergarten children and their families from Greensboro, NC participated in the investigation. The sample was evenly divided by gender--47.5% female (N=94)--and the racial composition of the sample was 78% White, 21% African-American.

Materials

Table 1 lists mean values for each of the predictor and outcome variables.

Background Demographic Characteristics. A 2-page parental self-report questionnaire was distributed during the first year of the study to gather demographic information about the child and family experiences.

Parental Control. Parents responded to a series of seventeen questions on a Parenting Questionnaire which assessed the amount of parental control (PC) in the participant's home. Questions on rules, limits and disciplinary practices included, for example, "Suppose your child was naughty and you felt he or she deserved a scolding. How likely would you be to do it when you were in public and someone else might hear?". Responses to these questions were standardized to control for different response scales and then summed to create an index ranging from -1.63 to 1.13 in the standard normal distribution.

Social Skills. Teachers completed the Cooper-Farran Behavior Rating Scale (CFBRS) at the start of kindergarten to measure classroom behavior. The sixteen questions which comprise a work-related skills (WRS) sub-scale were used for this project. The scale measured behaviors involved in the successful completion of academic tasks (independence, attentiveness, ability to follow directions, etc.).

Academic skills. Outcome assessments were made in several areas of academic achievement: letter recognition (% of alphabet correctly identified), receptive vocabulary (PPVT-R) and reading recognition (PIAT-R).

Results and Discussion

Predictability of Social Skills. Three regression analyses tested whether social skills were indeed related to academic achievement (path b in Figure 1). Results of these analyses are depicted in Table 2. Social skills predicted 19% of the variance in letter recognition ($F(1,152)=34.65$, $p<.001$), 14% in vocabulary scores ($F(1,152)=23.42$, $p<.001$), and 8% in reading recognition scores ($F(1,152)=13.42$, $p<.001$). Overall there was a strong and direct influence of children's work-related social skills on their literacy capabilities at school entry.

Relationship between PC and WRS. In the second step, a regression analysis was conducted to examine how parental control in the home and children's work-related social skills in kindergarten were related (path a in Figure 1 and Table 2). As expected, there was a significant positive relationship between control and work-related skills, $r^2=.05$, $F(1,151)=7.62$, $p<.01$. Consistent with other research on adolescents, there was a strong direct effect of parenting on social behavior (Lamborn et al., 1991); the present findings suggested that parental control techniques were at least in part focused on socialization efforts.

Relationship between PC and Academic Skills. Then the direct relationship between parental control and academic skills was tested (path c in Figure 1). There was a marginally significant tendency for parental rules/limits/discipline to predict letter recognition, receptive vocabulary, and reading recognition ($r^2=.01$, $F(1, 195)=2.81$, $p<.1$; $r^2=.02$, $F(1, 195)=3.16$, $p<.1$; $r^2=.01$, $F(1, 195)=2.73$, $p<.1$ respectively; see Table 2). In general, there appeared to be a modest link

between control and the three literacy outcomes which approached statistical significance, but the linkages were not nearly as strong as that seen between parental control and social skills.

The final step in the model tested whether the effects of control on literacy outcomes were mediated by the effects of social skills. The hypothesis was tested by assessing the association of control and academic outcomes when first controlling for the effects of social skills using hierarchical regressions. With the effects of work-related social skills removed, the tendency for literacy outcomes to be related to parental control was no longer apparent. For example, semi-partial correlation coefficients which statistically linked control and vocabulary no longer approached statistical significance after controlling for the effects of WRS (r^2_{Δ}=.00, F_{Δ}=.04, p<.85). The pattern of results was similar for letter recognition and reading scores. In summary, children's social skills acted as a mediator between parental control and literacy outcomes.

Conclusions

1. Social skills at school entry did predict children's literacy skill levels. Students who began school with higher work-related social skills had higher academic scores.

2. Parental control efforts during middle childhood directly impacted children's social skills, perhaps because socialization was a major focus of parents' school preparation efforts.

3. Finally, parental control, in and of itself, was only a moderate predictor of academic achievement. This suggests that parental control indirectly influenced literacy outcomes at school entry through its impact on work-related skills.

Taken together these results indicated that children's work-related social skills mediate the relationship between parental control and children's academic skills. Parenting control practices

(have rules, place limits, use discipline) appeared to help children develop optimal work-relevant learning skills and these skills in turn aided children in their acquisition of new academic skills.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Predictor, Mediator, and Outcome Variables

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Predictor:		
Parental Control (standardized)	-.00	.44
Mediator:		
Child's Work-related Social skills	5.48	1.16
Outcomes at Fall of K:		
Letter Recognition	85.16	25.29
Reading Recognition	11.69	7.02
Receptive Vocabulary	67.52	18.31

Table 2. Testing Mediation Model Analyses

	$R^2\Delta$	F of Δ	B	SE (B)	β
Analysis 1: Path b. Independent Variable is WRS.					
Dependent Variables at Fall of K:					
Letter Recognition	.19	34.64***	9.93	1.69	.43
Reading Recognition	.08	13.42***	1.80	.49	.28
Receptive Vocabulary	.13	23.42***	5.89	1.22	.37
Analysis 2: Path a. Independent Variable is Parental Control.					
Dependent Variable is WRS:	.05	7.62**	.57	.21	.22
Analysis 3: Path c. Independent Variable is Parental Control.					
Dependent Variables at Fall of K:					
Letter Recognition	.01	2.81τ	1.51	1.01	.11
Reading Recognition	.01	2.73τ	1.86	1.13	.12
Receptive Vocabulary	.02	3.16τ	5.24	2.95	.13
Analysis 4: (a.) Remove WRS, (b.) Path c.					
Dependent Variables at Fall of K:					
Letter Recognition	.00	.47	3.12	4.57	.05
Reading Recognition	.00	.27	.70	1.34	.04
Receptive Vocabulary	.00	.04	-.63	3.32	-.02

Note: τ $p<.10$, * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

Figure 1. Mediational Model Between Parents' Control in the Home, Work-related Social Skills and Academic Skills at Kindergarten Entry